Adams

AN

ORATION

DELIVERED

MARCH 5th, 1777.

DE

MALTA

47

5 20

1798.

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED

MARCH 5th, 1777,

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE INHABITANTS

OF THE

TOWN OF *BOSTON*;

TO

COMMEMORATE THE BLOODY TRAGEDY

OF THE

FIFTH of MARCH, 1770.

BY

BENJAMIN HICHBORN, Esq;

——Tum vos, O Tyrii, stirpem et genus omne futurum
Exercete odiis; cinerique haec mittite nostro
Munera: nullus amor populis, nec foedera sunto——

VIRGIL.

BOSTON:

Printed by EDES and GILL.

M, DCC, LXXVII.

AT a Meeting of the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of the Town of BOSTON, *duly aſſembled at* Faneuil-Hall, *and held by Adjournment at the* Old-Brick Meeting-Houſe *on Wedneſday the* Fifth *of* MARCH, Anno Domini, 1777.

UPON a Motion made, *Voted Unanimouſly*, That the Thanks of the Town be and hereby are given to BENJAMIN HICHBORN, Eſq; for the *ſpirited* Oration delivered by him at their Requeſt, in Commemoration of the horrid Maſſacre perpetrated on the Evening of the 5th of March, 1770, by a Party of Soldiers of the XXIXth Regiment, under the Command of Capt. Thomas Preſton, and that

Jonathan Williams, Eſq;
Mr. *Ellis Gray*,
John Brown, Eſq;
Hon. *Thomas Cuſhing*, Eſq;
Col. *Henry Jackſon*,
Mr. *Herman Brimmer*, and
Hon. *William Cooper*, Eſq;

Be a Committee to wait upon *Benjamin Hichborn*, Eſq; and to deſire a Copy of the Oration for the Preſs. *Atteſt*,

William Cooper, Town-Clerk.

GENTLEMEN!

ALWAYS eſteeming myſelf a ſervant of the Town, I cannot ſo far gratify my own wiſhes as to refuſe a compliance with their requeſt.

BENJAMIN HICHBORN.

March 7th, 1777.

AN
ORATION.

FRIENDS and COUNTRYMEN!

LEAVING apologies for my inability to act the part I am to take, in this day's ſolemnity, to thoſe who might have remedied the evil by a more ſuitable appointment—— I ſhall offer my ſentiments upon the ſubject with the ſame freedom that I conceived them.—

The advantages of ſocial Life, are the reſult of ſuch evident neceſſity, ſo extenſively diffuſive and univerſally felt, that all Mankind will readily acknowledge their exiſtence without the aid of metaphyſics or hiſtory.

The right that every individual has to reaſon freely upon the nature of that government he is called to ſubmit to, having nature for its ſource, is no leſs obvious and perceptable—and hence as a neceſſary foundation for the exerciſe of this right, I define civil liberty to be, not "a government by laws" made agreeable to charters, bills of rights or compacts, but a power exiſting in the people at large at any time, for any cauſe, or for no cauſe, but their own ſovereign pleaſure, to alter or annihilate both the mode and eſſence of any former government, and adopt a new one in its ſtead.

Placing

Placing ourſelves then upon this broad baſis of *civil liberty*, founded on *natural right*, we will unawed by the *ſtanding armies* of any tyrants, tools, * or monarchs, deliberate freely upon the nature of their inſtitutions, and their dangerous tendency to the rights of man.

Every military force muſt neceſſarily imply a right of exerciſing an arbitrary power, ſo far as reſpects the objects againſt which it is to be directed; and what will be the objects againſt which it will be in conſtant exerciſe in proportion to its extent, we may collect from the experience of ages, and the well-known ſource of human actions.

The page of hiſtory ſeldom groans with the calamities of mankind, but we may trace the ſource of their unhappineſs to this engine of oppreſſion.

Projected in the blackeſt principles of the human mind, and ſupported by ambition and a luſt of unbounded ſway, this *armed monſter* hath ſpread havock and miſery throughout the world—We find the bloody traces of its footſteps through all the ruins of greatneſs and freedom, either in ancient or modern times: the moſt free and opulent cities of the world, by conniving at its birth, have at laſt fallen a prey to its relentleſs fury. ‡

While

* The petty ſtates and princes who have raiſed their armies as a peaſant would his game cocks, and ſent them to market for a price, are in the moſt infamous ſenſe of the word, *tools*.

‡ Piſiſtratus of Athens, Dyoniſius of Syracuſe, and Cæſar of Rome, furniſh a few among numberleſs examples that hiſtory affords.

While we are raviſhed with the politeneſs, wiſdom and greatneſs of the *Grecian* ſtates, we can ſcarce believe that the productions of ſuch art, refinement and learning, ſhould ever be ſubdued by a power that never could have crept into life, but through the channel of *their* indulgence.

But alas! their fate remains a ſtanding MONUMENT of this truth, that freedom at ſufference is a ſolaciſm in politics.

To avoid the pain that humanity muſt ſuffer, upon finding ſo few inſtances of virtue that have been proof againſt the temptations to proſtitute a delegated power—I am inclined to think—that the great FOUNDER of ſocieties has cauſed the CURSE of infatuating ambition and relentleſs cruelty to be entailed on thoſe whoſe vanity may lead them to aſſume *his* prerogative among any of his people as they are cantoned about in the world, and to prevent mankind from paying that adoration and reſpect to the moſt dignified mortal, which is due only to *infinite wiſdom and goodneſs* in the direction of *Almighty power*, and therefore that he alone is fit to be a MONARCH.

Were we to traverſe the whole field of human tranſactions, and expect any where to find an exemption from this general charge, we ſhould moſt naturally fix our eyes upon the Romans—But how mortified do we find ourſelves by the ſurvey!

At the very time this people were moſt famed for their virtue and greatneſs,—while they were regaling themſelves with luxu-

rious

rious eaſe in the lap of freedom—the provinces they obtained by fraud and violence were ſuffering under every ſpecies of the vileſt ſervitude, and made to contribute to that very eaſe and luxury at the diſcretion of the moſt mercileſs unfeeling taſk-maſters.

But they themſelves, by the ſame tools they had armed to execute their bloody purpoſes, in their turn, became the ſubjects of the ſame kind of oppreſſion they ſo liberally dealt out to others, and ſtand recorded in hiſtory equal monuments of the greatneſs and depravity of human nature.

Taught by the experience of former ages—that a general at the head of an armed force would ever make himſelf ſuperior to the laws, Europe for ſeveral centuries raiſed effectual barriers againſt the danger (and I may ſay the poſſibility) of their uſurpations—for the tenure * of their lands though they acknowledge a ſuperior lord, was upon conditions ſo abhorrent to the idea of ſtanding armies, that it offered at once both a promiſe and a pledge againſt them.

But to convince us that no human inſtitutions can inſure permanent felicity to mankind;—*ſecurity*, the offſpring of eaſe and freedom, opened the door for one enterpriſing uſurper after another, ‡ till the inhabitants of the whole eaſtern world had but little left of the property of their ſpecies but what they poſſeſſed in their *ſhape*.—

Strange

* The feudal tenure.

‡ Charles VII and Lewis XI of France having ſet the example, all the crowned heads in Europe ſoon followed it.

Strange Metamorphoſis!—But is it not much ſtranger ſtill, to ſee theſe pitable wretches ſtript of every enjoyment that can render life a bleſſing, meanly courting favour of protection from the tyrants who enſlaved them, and eaſily miſtaken the *chains of ſervitude* for the *garbe of nature?*

The *formalities* of a *free* and the ends of a *deſpotic* State (ſays a modern writer) have often ſubſiſted together.—Britain furniſhes a moſt unhappy example of this ſhocking truth:—As if the reliſh of liberty was pampered to make ſlavery itſelf more intolerably loathſome, they feel all the mortifying conſequences of the baſeſt ſervitude, and are left to conſole themſelves with this conſideration, that the weight of their grievances can never be encreaſed, while they are *complimented*, or rather *tantalized* with the name of *Freemen*. Theſe are ſome of the glorious effects of ſtanding armies among *foreign nations*. Let us now conſider their conſequences in that part of the world, in whoſe affairs we take a more intereſting part.—

It is eaſy to conceive that thoſe men who would not ſcruple to make uſe of every artifice and violence to reduce the very people to whoſe generoſity they were indebted for their ſplendor, wealth and greatneſs, to a ſtate of vaſſalage, would never heſitate to make their conqueſts as extenſive as their power,—they can feel the influence of no *law* but that of the *ſword*, and therefore (whatever may be their pretentions) you will in every caſe find them ultimately make an appeal to its deciſions.

If ſuch are the *governors* what muſt the *people* be? Having been robbed of liberty themſelves, without the fainteſt ſtruggle

in its defence, * they are juſt fit to be made the inſtruments of wreſting it from others.

How can we expect that they who know nothing of the happineſs of freedom themſelves ſhould feel any reluctance at reducing all mankind to their own diſgraceful ſituation? Indeed the reverſe is true, for we generally find them taking an unnatural pleaſure, in ſtriping others of the nobleſt ornaments and gifts of nature to countenance their own deformity and wretchedneſs :—

A trifling farce therefore, upon the queſtion of *right* in parliament, was all the previous parade that was thought neceſſary to the introduction of a ſtanding army, with all the enſigns of war into the bowels of our country.

It is needleſs to recount the various preludes to hoſtilities, the fatal day we now commemorate, opened a ſcene that filled every honeſt mind with indignation, and every tender heart with diſtreſs. † ——It is impoſſible for any who were not witneſſes of that ſhocking event, to conceive the terrors of that dreadful night, and they who *were* muſt have images of horror upon the mind they never can communicate.

The variety of contending paſſions that once fall upon and diſtract the mind, upon the arrival of ſuch an important criſis, can never be realiſed but *once*. To

* The murder of two or three people in St. *George's* fields, ſeems to be all the ceremony attending the death and burial of Britiſh liberty.

† ——————————Quis talia fando,
Myrmidonum, dolopumve, aut duri miles ulyſſei,
Temperet a lachrymis. VIRGIL.

To ſee the peaceful inhabitants of a city, deliberately murdered by the very men, who in pretence, were ſupported for their protection—to hear the piercing groans, to ſee the mangled bodies and ghaſtly viſages of the dying and the dead—to hear the ſhrieks and cries of the timid, with the promiſcuous, mingling horrid ſound of arms, execrations and vengeance, produced a ſcene of confuſion and wretchedneſs ſo complicated and compleat, that the power of the richeſt language muſt ever fail in deſcribing it. *

The eye of pity is yet called to drop a tear at the ſufferings, and patriotiſm to pour the balm of charity over the wounds of half-murdered citizens, draging out a miſerable life, and freſh bleeding with the blows aimed at our country.

We could dwell with a melancholly pleaſure on this ſad cataſtrophy, did not a more ample field of violence, bloodſhed and cruelty demand our attention.

The palpable abſurdity of making uſe of the *name of a king*, to give a ſanction to thoſe very operations which were carrying on *againſt him*, has been ſo ſenſibly felt, through all ranks of men, that we have not yet altogether got rid of its diſagreeable effects.

And I muſt confeſs I ſhould bluſh at the ludicrous figure in which this part of our hiſtory muſt exhibit to view in future time, were we not countenanced by the ſame, or more ſtriking inconſiſtencies which are to be found attendant (and perhaps neceſſarily ſo) upon all important revolutions. We

* Non, mihi ſi linguæ centum ſint, oraque centum,
Ferrea vox, omnes ſcelerum comprendere formas
——————————poſſim. Virg.

We can eaſily conceive a mixture of prejudice and fear, that will excite ſuch awful ideas of the perſon, to whom we have been taught from our cradles, to annex the properties of *a moſt gracious ſovereign, moſt ſacred majeſty*, and a train of ſuch godlike attributes, as would make us feel conſcious of a degree of *impiety*, in calling a *villain* by his proper name, while ſhrouded under this garb of *ſanctity*.

But it is exceedingly diverting to view the influence of this chimerical divinity in thoſe who are made the immediate tools of ſupporting it—they will tell you it is a taſk moſt ungrateful to men of their ſenſibility and refinement, to be made the inſtruments of ſending fire and death indiſcriminately among the innocent, the helpleſs, and the fair—but they have ſworn to be faithful to their ſovereign, and were they ordered to ſcale the walls of the new Jeruſalem, they ſhould not dare to decline the impious attempt.

Were it not for this ridiculous faith in the omnipotence of the tyrant whom they ſerve, we muſt ſuppoſe them fools or madmen :—Indeed that very faith would juſtify the charge of extreme madneſs and folly againſt all mankind who had not been nurtured in this cradle of infatuation.

Were it not for the indulgence that a generous mind will always ſhew to the weakneſs and prejudices of the worſt of men, many whom the chance of war has thrown into our hands muſt have felt the ſeverity and contempt of a juſtly enraged people, while they with all their vanity and oſtentation remain the *unhurt objects of our pity*.

It is ſurely rather a ſubject of merry ridicule than deſerving of ſerious reſentment, to ſee many of this kind of gentry affecting to

deny

deny the character of prisoners, and attributing that indulgence which is the effect of unparelled generosity, to the mean motives of fear—but we will let them know, that they cannot provoke us even to *justice* in the line of *punishment*—and we leave them to their own consciences and the impartial censures of surrounding nations, to make some returns for the unexampled cruelties that many of our friends have suffered from their barbarous hands; * in lieu of that severity, which however just, humanity shudders to inflict. But we cannot think it strange to find people in the subordinate departments of life, influenced by such ridiculous notions, while their haughty masters seem to labour under the misfortune of the same infatuation.

Slaves always rate the consequence of those they serve, by the treatment they receive from them, and wonder that others do not feel the weight of the same importance.

To call men of distinguished rank in *any government*, *Knaves*, *Fools and Scoundrels*, however they may deserve it, is esteemed neither polite or decent:—I am therefore at a loss for names while

* Capt. *Johnson* and his crew, the prisoners in general at *New-York* and *Halifax*, Mr. *Lovell* and many others in *Boston*, are instances sufficient to destroy the little credit they ever had for humanity—and the sufferings of some to which I have myself been a witness, exposed to all the inconveniencies and hazards of a languishing disease in confinement on ship board, in view of the persons and habitations of their nearest friends and a sympathizing parent turned over the side with reproaches for attempting to speak to his sick, suffering, dying child, must give the characters of the *polite*, *sensible*, *humane* Admiral Graves, and his nephew Sam, a stamp of infamy, which the power of time can never wipe away.

while I am deſcribing the oppreſſors of my country.—Who without deſerving theſe reproachful appellations, could have conceived the horrid wiſh of decking his crown, with the idle plume of foreign empire at, the expence of the peace, wealth and very being of a *nation?* And who but a *pompous blockhead*, in the execution of this impious deſign could expect to conquer a hardy, virtuous ſet of men, by ineffectual threats and empty promiſſes, contained in a ſet of *proclamations* he wanted either courage or power to diſperſe among the people they were deſigned to ſubdue? *

Poſſibly they may conceive the length of their maſter's purſe at the rate of thirty crowns a man, to be equal to all the armed force of Europe, and therefore they ſhould be able ultimately to effect that by the point of the bayonet which they rather wiſhed, than *expected* to obtain on any other terms.

Here let us pauſe, and for the honor of our ſpecies, give a moment to reflection upon this ſhocking idea! is it poſſible that any of the race of man, ſhould be ſo loſt to a ſenſe of the rights of nature and the dignity of their rank in the chain of beings, as to ſuffer themſelves (like the horſes which they ride) to be tutored to the field of war, to have a price ſet upon their lives which their maſters will receive, and then be ſold into the ſervice of *luſt*, *ambition* and *avarice*, and become the tools of eternal war againſt the lives, the properties and freedom of the reſt of mankind.

But

* The Generals, Gage and Howe, have been playing this warlike game ever ſince they have been in the country.

But thanks to heaven! this black combination of paſſions ſupported by the unmaſked-tyrant of Britain with all the mecenary forces of his powerful and extenſive allies, have hitherto proved unſucceſsful (and I truſt in God they ever will) in every effort to contaminate the only column of free air in *both hemiſpheres*—however, one advantage we derive from their *open attempts*, which is to expect no ſecurity for ourſelves but in their ruin—deliberate murders, indiſcriminate plunder and the moſt barbarous violence upon the delicacy and virtue of the fair, have marked the few paces of *imaginary conqueſt* they have trod. *

Methinks I ſee the tender parent frantic with rage, defying hoſts of ruffians armed, and courting death in every diſmal form, rather than live the witneſs of his daughters ſhame—ah! hear the ſhrieks of virgin innocence calling in vain for ſuccour from that arm which oft defended her! but ſee the helpleſs victim of their brutiſh luſt, in wild deſpair wringing her *guiltleſs hands*, with looks to heaven, as if, without a crime, ſhe had loſt her only title to thoſe pure abodes! where is the *coward heart* that does not beat to arms and glow with unuſual ardour for revenge?

Where are friends to reconciliation, with theſe foes to virtue? They will tell us their power is formidable, and it is wiſe to accommodate ourſelves to the requiſitions of ſuperior force—as ſoon I'd tamper with the power of hell! for

———" *'Tis the worſt of ſlavery*
" *Tamely to bend our necks beneath the yoke*
" *And ſuffer fraud to talk us out of freedom.*"

* See accounts of their proceedings in the *Jerſies*, and general orders in the orderly book taken at *Trenton*.

They wish to ſooth but to deſtroy us ; and if this ſtale artifice of tyrants ſhould ſucceed, we well deſerve the ruin it enſures :—they never *aſk* for what they can *demand* and impotence alone prevents a *general carnage.*

Does courage want a ſtimulous in the defence of virtues ; let us caſt our eyes on the example of our illuſtrious General ;—equally beyond the reach of calumny and encomium, the tongue of ſlander has never dared to attack him, while the ableſt panegeriſt muſt bluſh when he is attempting to give him *half* the eulogiums which are his due.

The generous ſacrifice he has made of private intereſt, domeſtic felicity, and all the conſequent refined enjoyments of ſocial life to the exigencies of his country in the field of war—the cheerfulneſs with which he has ſuſtained all the hardſhips, anxieties and diſappointments of two important campaigns, againſt a formidable body of well-diſciplined veterans, with an army compoſed of men different in their manners, and unuſed to the diſcipline of a camp, without exciting the ſmalleſt jealouſies in the CIVIL POWER on the one hand, or giving occaſion for the fainteſt murmurs among his *ſoldiers* on the other.—And finally when his enemies were at the zenith of their glory, and in imagination, already in poſſeſſion of a conquered world ;—*with the remnant of his expiring army,* to reſume the field, and with *this handful* of his choſen followers, diſperſe, deſtroy or captivate whole hoſts of foes, muſt excite ſentiments of affection, gratitude and eſteem, that border upon *adoration.*

Did

Did not a life of the moſt diſintereſted patriotiſm and unremitted ardour in the cauſe of virtue and of mankind, point him out as an exception to the charge we have ſo fully ſupported againſt all who lived before him? I ſhould dread more from the virtues of this *great man*, than from all the ſtanding armies in the world.

But ſo full a confidence do I poſſeſs in his inviolable attachment to the rights of humanity and the cauſe of freedom, that in ſome future *emergencies* of the ſtate—(produced perhaps by the ſhifting fortune of war)—to his inſtinctive goodneſs and excentric operations, I would moſt cheerfully commit ſupreme command.

I will explain my ſentiments upon this ſubject, by thoſe of a friend, in his own words.

" 'Tis beſt that *reaſon* govern man,
'Tis calm, deliberate, wiſe,
Yet *paſſions* were not given in vain,
Here then the difference lies.

Reaſon, tho' *ſure*, too ſlow is found
In great emergencies,
While *paſſion* inſtant feels the wound,
As quick the cure applies.

Yet *that* muſt not due bounds tranſgreſs,
But move at *reaſon's* nod,

Submit at laſt to her decrees
And own her for the GOD.

'Twas thus the ſynod of our land,
The *reaſoning power* of ſtate,
Gave WASHINGTON ſupreme command
And made his orders fate.

Yet as *neceſſity* impelled
The ſtep—when that is paſt
The *Senate* ſhall reſume the field
And reign ſupreme at laſt."

In the ſupport of ſuch a cauſe, directed by ſuch a leader, who would think his life too dear a ſacrifice?—Let the mean, baſe, grovling ſoul, that wiſhes for ſecurity on *any terms*—thro' fear forget he is a man, cringe to the creature he diſpiſes, ſmile on the man he hates, alternately ſhake hands with vice and virtue, and court protection from the power he wiſhes to deſtroy!—Let us my friends! determined to maintain our ſacred rights or periſh in the attempt, * with vigour urge the war, frown on our foes where'er we meet them, deſpiſe their *mercy* when we feel their *power*, and from this moment hold ourſelves beyond the reach of *pardon*.

* Juſtum et tenacem, propoſiti virum,
Non civium ardor, prava jubentium
Non vultus inſtantis tyranni
Mente quatit ſolida :——